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DTE Craftsmen Erect Wildlife Sculpture at Refuge Gateway in Trenton

When bicyclists, walkers and joggers visit the Refuge Gateway in Trenton, they will pass a towering new steel wildlife sculpture that depicts the ecological recovery and biodiversity of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (IWR).

As part of DTE Energy's commitment to the environment and sustainability, DTE employees first erected a 12-foot wildlife sculpture at the entrance of its River Rouge Power Plant. Based on the overwhelming positive feedback on that project, DTE Energy employees approached staff of the Detroit River IWR to see if they might be interested in a similar wildlife sculpture at the Refuge Gateway in Trenton. Refuge staff jumped at the opportunity and immediately began working with DTE employees to design a four-sided, 16-foot piece of art that will welcome thousands of projected annual visitors to North America's only international wildlife refuge.

Whether entering the Refuge on a greenway trail to enjoy the new Visitor Center, fishing off a 775-foot pier, boarding the Great Lakes school ship, kayaking in the marsh, bird watching from observation decks, or hiking in Michigan's only "Wetland of International Importance," visitors will be able to see the wildlife sculpture. It might best be described as a Christmas tree-shaped sculpture made of three-eighth-inch-thick steel. Upon closer look, you will see lake sturgeon and walleye at the bottom, cattails, turtles, dragonflies, woodpeckers and blue heron as you move up the symbolic food web, and bald eagles as top predators at the pinnacle.

"It is an amazing piece of nature art that will not only welcome our visitors, but inspire them to become part of the next generation of conservationists," noted Steve Dushane, Assistant Refuge Manager of the Detroit River IWR.

"This is a wonderful example of our employee base coming together with our community and the environment to do great things," said DTE Energy Plant Director Lynette Dowler, who approved the project. "We aspire to be a force for growth and prosperity in the communities where we live and serve, and this terrific sculpture exemplifies that spirit."

The project champion was Jason Cousino, field safety specialist at DTE Energy's River Rouge Power Plant, who sketched out the initial design free-hand.

“Designing and building this sculpture really was a partnership between DTE’s River Rouge, Trenton Channel and Monroe power plants. It’s a great way to show people that DTE is truly committed to environmental stewardship and wildlife habitat,” Cousino said.

The project had its challenges. The 3,600-pound sculpture was so large that it actually had to be cut in half to get it to the Refuge Gateway and then welded back together on site. Mid-American in Monroe donated the concrete and set forms for the artwork’s foundation.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and DTE Energy, a 2013 Michigan Green Leader, have a long history of working together on furthering conservation and environmental sustainability and improving quality of life. DTE Energy was the first company to sign a cooperative management agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 656 acres of land at the Fermi Power Plant. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and DTE Energy have also worked with other partners to demonstrate soft shoreline engineering techniques, construct a sturgeon spawning reef off Fighting Island in the Detroit River, restore common tern habitat, install a bald eagle platform on Humbug Island and an osprey platform on the Refuge’s Strong Unit, and build trails, wildlife observation decks, and environmental education shelter in Humbug Marsh.

The Detroit River IWR incorporates 5,800 acres along 48 miles of the Detroit River and western Lake Erie. The Refuge focuses on conserving, protecting, and restoring habitat for 29 species of waterfowl, 23 species of raptors, 31 species of shorebirds, over 100 species of fish, and over 300 species of birds. It is the first international refuge in North America and one of the few urban ones. Unique habitats being managed for conservation include islands, coastal wetlands, marshes, shoals, and waterfront lands. The Western Lake Erie Watersheds Priority Natural Area is the institutional mechanism for Canadian federal, provincial, and local partners to cooperatively work with U.S. partners on the International Wildlife Refuge.

DTE Energy is a Detroit-based diversified energy company involved in the development and management of energy-related businesses and services nationwide. Its operating units include an electric utility serving 2.1 million customers in Southeastern Michigan and a natural gas utility serving 1.2 million customers in Michigan. The DTE Energy portfolio also includes non-utility energy businesses focused on power and industrial projects and energy trading. . Information about DTE Energy is available at dteenergy.com, twitter.com/dte_energy and facebook.com/dteenergy. The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is “working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.” For more information on the Service, visit www.fws.gov.

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DTE Energy erects wildlife sculpture at Refuge Gateway in Trenton, MI (photo credit: DTE Energy)



Wildlife sculpture that will welcome visitors to the future Visitor Center of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (photo credit: DTE Energy)